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ABSTRACT

Values in the workplace have long been a topic of interest for both researchers in organizational behavior and management practitioners alike. Values are believed to be deeply internalized standards for personal behavior because they are based on a person's experience. Relatively little attention has been paid to the processes relating to individual differences in value stability. Such individual differences should have implications for the relationship between values and decision-making. This study examined the issue of work value stability and the extent to which individual differences in value stability affect the relationship between values and decision-making. Subjects, undergraduate college students (N=79), participated in three survey sessions. At each session they completed a work values measure and a decision-making task. At the second session, an effort was made to alter the importance of one value, concern for others. Results indicated that while as a whole, values were relatively stable over the short time interval studied, some individuals were more stable than others. These people were more likely to emphasize their values in decision-making. This study raises important issues with regard to predicting behavior from values. Not only are outside influences a factor in reducing the explanatory power of values, but by failing to discriminate between individuals who have developed self-schemas concerning particular values from those who have not, ability to understand the values-behavior relationship is limited. (Author/ABL)

Stability of Work Values: Individual Differences and Relationship with Decision Making

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Stability of Work Values: Individual Differences and Relationship with Decision Making

This research examined the issue of work value stability and the extent to which individual differences in value stability affect the relationship between values and decision making. A total of 79 undergraduates participated in three survey sessions. At each session, they completed a work values measure and a decision making task. At Session 2, an effort was made to alter the importance of one value, concern for others. Results indicated that while as a whole, values were relatively stable over the short time interval studied, some individuals were more stable than others. These people were more likely to emphasize their values in decision making.

Stability of Work Values: Individual Differences and Relationship with Decision Making

Values in the workplace have long been a topic of interest for both researchers in organizational behavior and management practitioners alike. Values are believed to be deeply internalized standards for personal behavior (Rokeach, 1973) because they are based on a person's experience (Jones & Gerard, 1967; Locke, 1982). Because of this internalization, values tend to be more stable over time than other kinds of attitudes and beliefs (e.g., Kluckhohn, 1951; Rokeach, 1973). While attitudes are regarded as more readily changed and more situational in nature, values are thought to be stable influences which are not easily altered, and therefore, may be more predictive of behavior over the long term. If these assumptions are correct, knowledge of employee values and an understanding of the socialization of values are important tools for organizations to use in their efforts to increase effectiveness. The study presented here examines several aspects of the stability of work values. First, we examined the impact of change agents on the stability of values over a short time period. Second, we identified individual differences in value stability, and third, we explored the relationship between the degree of stability of values and decision making.

Values have been defined in many ways in the literature. In general, values are considered to be either valued aspects of work (e.g., Rosenberg, 1957; Super, 1970), such as security or

challenge, or they are considered to be beliefs about various forms of work behavior (e.g., Mirels & Garrett, 1971; Wollack, Goodale, Wijting, & Smith, 1971). Here, we take the second, or social approach to work values, and define them as beliefs about the way one "should" or "ought" to behave. Because values specify behaviors which are representative of what ought to be done, not what is intended, what is usual, or most pleasurable, they are high in social desirability. Thus measurement instruments which require a choice between socially desirable values are most appropriate for limiting social desirability response set.

Theorists have long claimed that values relate to behavior and decision making, and some evidence has been found which supports this belief (e.g., Mirels & Garrett, 1971; Ravlin & Meglino, 1987a). However, one would anticipate that the relationship between values and behavior would be a weak one at any given point in time, given other influences on behavior, and that the importance of values would be in their ability to predict patterns of behavior over the long term. Epstein (1979, 1980) notes that personality variables for many years were not thought to be particularly predictive of behavior, however, when the relationship was examined carefully over time and across situations, a longitudinal pattern was in fact evident. We feel that values operate in much the same way, that is, they influence behavior over long periods of time and across situations. This relationship, unfortunately, is not easily researchable. Much depends on the assumed stability of values, and thus, an

understanding of the nature of value stability is imperative in understanding the relationship between values and behavior.

Research on the stability of values has suggested that in fact values are highly stable over very long periods of time (e.g., Arsenian, 1970; Goodale, 1973; Hazer & Alvares, 1981; Jurgensen, 1978; Lusk & Oliver, 1974). This is not to say that no changes occur. Occupational differences seem to influence values as occupational tenure increases (e.g., Lindsay & Knox, 1984; Mortimer & Lorence, 1979). Other research has focused on the influence of changes in the social climate on values (e.g., Fliegel, 1976; Ondrack, 1973; Staats, 1981). Despite this concern for how values are changed, relatively little attention has been paid to the processes relating to individual differences in value stability. It seems reasonable to suppose that individuals differ in the extent to which their values can be changed, and as has been demonstrated with other types of persuasion, that these differences affect the relationship between values and behavior.

One area of research which may be useful in conceptualizing individual differences in value stability is the literature on self-schemata. Self-schemata are "cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of self-related information contained in the individual's social experiences" (Markus, 1977, p. 64). Markus has suggested that cognitive structures which organize information about the self are most likely to exhibit observable influences. Although values may well be conceptualized as

schematic elements, individuals may not be schematic on all values. Markus notes that "to the extent that individuals do not possess an articulated self-schema on a particular dimension of behavior, they will not exhibit consistency in response" (p. 65), that is, "a correspondence between self-categorization and overt behavior depends on the mediating self-schemata" (p. 77). One may therefore anticipate that some individuals will, based on their past social experience, have clearly developed and internalized hierarchies of values, which lead to stable interpretations and responses over time. Others, because they do not not have such well developed or internalized self-schemata, may exhibit greater variability in their cognitions and behavior.

Thus while in general, values appear to be basically stable elements, there should in fact be individual differences in their degree of stability. Such individual differences should have implications for the relationship between values and decision making. Individuals who demonstrate low value stability should demonstrate less consistency between their stated values (in response to questions on aschematic dimensions) and decision making than individuals high in value stability.

Hypotheses

Based on the above literature, the following hypotheses were examined:

1. Work values will exhibit significant stability over time.

2. Individuals demonstrating high stability of values over time will use their values in decision making to a greater extent than individuals low in value stability.

Method

Subjects and Procedure

A total of 79 undergraduate business majors responded to questionnaires at three separate sessions separated by time periods which varied between two and three weeks. This time span was chosen as appropriate for identifying differences in stability related to the degree to which values are schematicized, but not so long as to introduce instability created by life events. Each survey took about 15 minutes to complete. Subjects received extra course credit for their participation.

Each session was identical except for Session 2. At this session, a change effort was initiated. It was determined that one of the values being studied, "concern for others", was ranked first by only 11% of the sample at Session 1, and an effort to increase its importance was made. Subjects listened to a 15 minute talk, which noted how they had responded in Session 1, and suggested several reasons why concern for others should be considered as more important (for further information on changing values using a similar approach, see Rokeach, 1973). Attention was called to elements of the successful Japanese management style, and to an article in the Wall Street Journal which addressed the issue of orientation towards people rather than orientation to personal achievement. Following this discussion, subjects filled out the measures as described below.

Measures

At each of the three sessions, subjects filled out a rank order measure of four values (achievement, honesty, concern for others, and fairness; see Ravlin & Meglino, 1987a, 1987b for information on construct validity and other details concerning this instrument). Subjects were then given a decision making task, which required them to evaluate, on a scale from 1 (outstanding) to 7 (poor), 25 fictitious individuals on the basis of a set of ratings for each individual. Subjects were asked to act as a manage in evaluating each employee profile based on ratings on the four value dimensions given above. The task included 16 unique profiles designed to present all possible combinations of high and low ratings on each value (thus the value ratings were orthogonal) plus 9 duplicate profiles (see Ravlin & Meglino, 1987a for more details on this task). Within subject regression analysis was then used to determine the weight each subject placed on each of the four values in making his or her decisions for each of the three time periods.

Results

In order to evaluate whether subjects held stable values over the time period studied, within subject correlations between the values measure at each of the three time period were computed for each subject. These within subject correlations were then cumulated using Fisher's r to z transformation. This procedure was used because the rank order data generated by the values measure are ipsative, and therefore, typical between subject analytic procedures could not be used (Hicks, 1970). Results

suggested that over the total sample, and despite the change effort, values were stable over this time period (see Table 1).

In order to examine individual differences in stability, a stability index was derived by calculating a difference score for each value between time periods and summing across all four values. The sample was then divided approximately in thirds on the stability index, and the data from the top and bottom thirds examined further. Mean stability scores for the resulting high and low stability groups were significantly different (t= 16.7, p=.0001). The data suggest that the low value stability group was more responsive to the change effort at Time 2 than the high stability group.

To determine whether the two stability groups used their values to a significantly different extent in making their decisions, t tests were used to compare the degree to which values related to decision making in the high stability group to the values-decision relationship in the low stability group at each of the three time periods. Results are given in Table 2. Clearly, at each of the specific points in time individuals in the high values stability group used their values in decision making more than those in the low stability group. In particular, at Time 1, prior to any intervention, the high stability group used their values significantly more in making their decisions than those in the low stability group (t=1.84, p=.04). Results at Times 2 and 3 were marginally significant (see Table 2).

Because concern for others was the value of primary interest

in this study, a further analysis was undertaken using the rank order measure solely as a measure of concern for others. Correlation coefficients between the rank for concern for others (adjusted such that higher numbers equal greater importance) and the beta weight for concern are presented in Table 3. The correlation at Time 1 was higher for the high stability group than for the low stability group (z=1.94, p=.03).

Interestingly, in the low stability group the intervention appeared to have the effect of increasing the relationship between the values measure and decision making (see Table 3). In fact, the only significant correlation between the ranking and the beta weight for concern is at Time 2. Implications of this tendency are discussed below.

Discussion

The above study begins an investigation of an area of values research which has important implications for our understanding of the role of internalization of values in the relationship between values and behavior. While the study here once again confirms the view that values are basically stable cognitive elements, it also raises the issue of important individual differences in stability.

These differences in stability were related to the degree to which values were used in decision making. Individuals who had a highly stable value hierarchy emphasized their values more in making their decisions than did low stability individuals. Overall, the research suggests that most probably, a third variable, internalization, is causing both lack of stability over

time and lack of use of values in making decisions. More research on cognitive structure and process related to values is necessary to confirm this view.

As the significant Time 2 correlation for the low stability group indicates, managers or others may make use of short term influence processes to increase the likelihood that the values they wish to be emphasized are in fact translated into some form of behavior. That is, individuals who lack a schema for the particular valued behavior as a personal standard may be influenced, at least in the short run, to express and act on that value. It is important to note that this is a short run technique. However, since internalization is a function of experience, if influence processes are maintained, one might expect eventual internalization of the value.

While the study presented here has some limitations caused by the nature of the sample and the compressed time period over which it was performed, it raises important issues with regard to predicting behavior from values. Not only are outside influences a factor in reducing the explanatory power of values, but by failing to discriminate between individuals who have developed self-schemas concerning particular values from those who have not, we again limit our ability to understand the values-behavior relationship.

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Table 1

Stability of Work Values over Time

	z	p
Time 1/Time 2	11.91	.0000
Time 1/Time 3	12.65	.0000
Time 2/Time 3	14.07	.0000

Note. Z scores adjusted according to the formula $Z = \bar{n}(\bar{N}-3)$ where $\bar{z}$ = average z for the sample, $\bar{n}$ = the number of subjects in the sample, and $\bar{N}$ = the number of pairs of scores in the correlations.

Table 2

Use of Values in Decision Making at Times 1, 2, and 3: High versus Low Stability Individuals

	t	*p*
Time 1	1.84	.04
Time 2	1.47	.08
Time 3	1.56	.06

Note. *t* values are for one tailed tests

Table 3

Correlations between Concern for Others Rank and Beta Weight in Decision Task

	r	p
High Stability		
Time 1	.658	.0001
Time 2	.515	.0036
Time 3	.249	.1840
Low Stability		
Time 1	.257	.1710
Time 2	.378	.0397
Time 3	.233	.2161